DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 895 TM 011 526

AUTHOR Lucas, Christopher J.
TITLE Accountability and Assessment in American Higher Education: Two Case Studies.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Professors of Education in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; *Case Studies; *Educational Assessment; *Higher Education; National Surveys; *Outcomes of Education; Politics of Education; *Standardized Tests; Student Evaluation; Universities
IDENTIFIERS Northeast Missouri State University; University of Missouri Columbia

ABSTRACT

Case studies of attempts to implement accountability and assessment programs at Northeast Missouri State University and the University of Missouri, Columbia, illustrate the benefits and impacts of such programs. The programs variously incorporated demographic data, national standardized test results, and surveys of student attitudes. The American College Test, graduate record examinations, professional certification instruments, employers' surveys, writing and critical thinking instruments, and the Cooperative Institutional Program survey scores are used to gather quantitative and qualitative information about learning outcomes. Political processes and faculty reactions involved in the implementation of the programs prove that such facets are central to any attempt to establish such a program. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED294895

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: TWO CASE STUDIES

Christopher J. Lucas*

Introduction

American higher education has enjoyed unprecedented popular support in recent years, evidenced in part by what amounts to a doubling of public and private support over the past two decades. Likewise, participation has reached an all-time proportional high, with current enrollment exceeding 18 million, or roughly half of all U.S. high-school graduates. Public funding has been inspired, historically, by a faith that higher learning affords the basis of national well-being, economic progress, and personal self-development. Even today post-secondary education is still widely perceived as the gateway to the American dream.[1]

Nevertheless, academe in the late 1980's confronts a crisis of major proportions--and it is one of confidence, or, more precisely, of doubt about the ability of higher education to deliver on its promise. The continued health and vitality of colleges and universities, many argue, depends upon adherence to rigorous standards of achievement—for students, faculty and institutions themselves. Recent evidence, however, documented in an array of reports highly critical of undergraduate education, suggests this has not been the case. As the 1985 report of the Southern Regional Education Board warned

---

*Professor of Education Studies, University of Missouri-Columbia and current President, Society of Professors of Education.

Prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Society of Professors of Education, held in conjunction with the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 6, 1988.

TM 011 526

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Christopher J. Lucas
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

bluntly, "The quality and meaning of undergraduate education has fallen to a point at which mere access has lost much of its value."[2]

Signs of scholastic underachievement, coupled with resulting public dissatisfaction, are not lacking. Student performance on professional licensure tests and parts of the Graduate Record Examination, for example, reportedly has declined markedly in the last decade.[3] Faculty complaints about students' lessened interest in learning are as vociferous as they are commonplace.[4] State policy makers across the country voice fears that the quality of teaching in public collegiate institutions has begun to suffer.[5] Even popular periodicals are weighing in with accusations of lack of quality controls in higher education.[6]

Conjecture over what has gone wrong abounds. Some attribute a seeming loss of focus and sense of priorities by some institutions to the effects of overheated expansion. Others claim exaggerated emphasis upon specialized research has led to a neglect of baccalaureate-level instruction.[8] Still other critics blame a "permissive social milieu" generally for falling standards, lowered expectations, anemic curricula and a host of other ills.[9] Whatever the specific factors adduced, the pervasive and disquieting suspicion is that undergraduate education today has entered upon a significant decline.

Laments over academic mediocrity from public figures and professional associations alike have, if anything grown more frequent. They range from Secretary of Education William Bennett's 1984 critique of the condition of the humanities, To Reclaim A Legacy; to the 1985 report entitled Integrity in the College Curriculum put forth by the Association of American Colleges, in which an alleged lack of institutional accountability was termed nothing less than "scandalous." More recently, the Southern Regional Education Board's

Commission for Educational Quality has appealed for the forging of a "new covenant" between higher education and its various constituencies to improve academic quality and more closely monitor students' academic performance.[10]

Skeptical about the willingness or ability of colleges to clean their own house, some state governments have already begun imposing more stringent admission requirements, mandating achievement tests, and revising funding formulae to reward institutions already assessing student learning outcomes or otherwise endeavoring to provide evidence of accountability.[11] More of the same seems likely in future years. "If American higher education is to forestall the imposition of a state system of examinations," one observer warns, "it will have to improve its own forms of quality control...." He adds, "If the academy does not strengthen those controls of its own volition, it may find government moving to do so in ways that jeopardize the core of the enterprise."[12]

In a similar vein, at the College Board's 1985 annual meeting, William Bennett prophesied that should higher-education institutions fail to implement their own reliable systems for measuring academic achievement, external agencies, including state bodies, would do it for them.[13] Echoing the same point, Clifford Adelman, among others, urged university administrators to adopt a mode of "protective anticipation," exercising the initiative before finding themselves impelled to take action by outside forces.[14]

The Logic of Assessment

Common to most reform proposals is the demand for systematic and precise measurement of learning outcomes. Prerequisite to success is some clear specification of goals and objectives. Lacking agreement on its purposes, assessment proponents argue, there are no explicit standards or criteria by

which an institution can ascertain the degree to which it is succeeding or failing in meeting its aims. A college or university thus must decide what it is about before it can begin to gauge its effectiveness in fulfilling an academic mission. Only after desired outcomes have been delineated or operationally defined, the argument continues, is it possible to administer instruments to test for actual performance or achievement. Then, based on the congruence or discrepancy between intention and result, appropriate expedients can be employed for purposes of remediation and improvement. The value of assessment is therefore two-fold: it imposes a need for precision and clarity about intended outcomes and, if successful , it indicates whether such aims have been achieved.,

Institutional self-appraisal takes different forms, Virtually all evaluation programs or systems, however, employ some combination of post-admission diagnosis, attitudinal and opinion surveys, instructional and course evaluations, academic achievement tests, and exit examinations or their equivalents. The more ambitious undertakings go further in providing multiple measures and observers to track students' intellectual and personal growth over some extended period of time, up to and beyond graduation. Instrumentation typically encompasses both nationally-normed standardized tests and "home-grown" supplements or alternatives.

Whether the focus is upon general learning, non-cognitive change and development, or mastery of specialized knowledge in an academic discipline or area, the logic of testing holds that results must be empirically demonstrable. Failing this, neither good intentions nor lofty rhetoric is sufficient to show whether the college or university is succeeding in the tasks to which it devotes itself.

"Value-added" assessment represents one highly-touted framework for fixing the degree to which an academic institution is fulfilling its purposes. By now the outlines of the argument advanced on its behalf are quite familiar. It opens with a plea for a conceptual reinterpretation of collegiate "quality" or "excellence." As Alexander W. Astin, President of UCLA's Higher education Research Institute, expresses it, "While American higher education has long prided itself on its 'diversity', the fact remains that most of the more than three thousand institutions that make up this vast system have come to embrace a remarkably narrow conception of 'excellence.'"[15] Essentially, for most institutions, the pursuit of excellence equates with the pursuit of resources: money, ever-expanding facilities, highly credentialed faculty, and more capable students. Those colleges that succeed in amassing a disproportionately large share of resources are regarded as excellent; the others tend to be regarded, at best, as mediocre.[16]

A value-added approach, on the other hand, he argues, poses an alternative to defining quality based on some vague consensus of external opinion or an institution's reputation for garnering resources.[17] It is based instead on the positive influence an institution has on students' intellectual and personal development. A college or university begins by identifying outcome goals. It then selects points in time--from entry to graduation--where progress is to be measured. By comparing pre- and post-tests, gains are ascertained. The difference in student performance presumably reveals the "value added." The focus of attention so far as institutional quality is concerned is not upon mere resource acquisition or sheer competiveness, but upon how existing resources are used to enhance students' learning.[18]

Few if any institutions of higher learning have yet emplaced a "value-added" model of assessment, though some have begun to move in that direction. Among them is Northeast Missouri State University (NEMSU), a residential undergraduate institution of about 6,500 students, located in Kirksville, Missouri. It affords one of the best-known examples of a school attempting to satisfy the demand for tangible evidence that students, parents, public officials and tax payers are receiving their money's worth.

Documenting a "Positive Difference"

As the decade of the 1960's drew to a close, Northeast Missouri State University faced the likelihood of demographic decline within the geographical region it served and from which it drew most of its students. More ominous still for a former normal school was the prospect of plummeting enrollments in its teacher education program--long the institution's curricular mainstay. If NEMSU was to survive and preserve its viability as an academic institution, programmatic diversification seemed imperative.

Integral to the refashioning of Northeast as a multipurpose university in the early '70s was a decision to embark upon a comprehensive effort to assess student learning outcomes. A "conceptual system" was devised identifying critical contact points and data elements to be observed at each point throughout the duration of each student's stay at Northeast. Three types of data were deemed essential. The first was standard demographic information such as gender, race or ethnicity, geographic origin, high-school rank, entering test scores, major, grade point average, and so on. The second were measures of academic achievement according to national standardized test results. The third was surveys of students' attitudinal and perceptual changes over time. As summarized for the National Director of the American

Association for Higher Education's Assessment Forum, the "key features" or parts of NEMSU's student assessment program as it has evolved since the mid-1970s include:

(1) a "value-added" component which seeks to measure student growth in general knowledge between the beginning of the freshman year and the end of the sophomore year through successive administration of national standardized examinations;

(2) a "comparative" component which seeks to demonstrate student achievement in the major field by means of a nationally standardized test, or when not available, a locally-developed examination;

(3) an "attitudinal" component which seeks to determine student self-perceptions of growth and evaluations of the university and its services by means of a variety of questionnaire surveys administered at various points over the student's academic career.[19]

The ACT (American College Test) is strongly recommended for all freshmen entering Northeast and is administered to any student who is accepted without an ACT score. During the freshman year, all new students are administered the ACT College Outcomes Measures Project (COMP) objective test. Test scores represent what NEMSU official term the "imput potential" of each student and provide baseline data for subsequent comparisons. Additionally, all first-time freshmen are required to take a locally-developed mathematics placement test during summer orientation as well as a Summer Orientation Student Survey (SOSS), the latter of which generates information on students' goals, reasons for college choice, and overall perceptions of the university. Further data on student attitudes, demographic characteristics and educational goals are collected from a nationally-normed Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey administered to all freshmen. A CIRP follow-up survey is completed two years later, thereby providing longitudinal and comparative data on changes in the student population.

Also used is an Institutional Student Survey (ISS), a locally-developed survey distributed biennially to all currently enrolled students. The resulting data are aggregated by academic majors and disciplines to provide internal institutional comparisons of students' academic progress, personal growth and reported satisfaction with university programs and services. The ACT Withdrawing/Non-returning Student Survey is sent to all former students who have elected to discontinue their studies at Northeast.

During the sophomore year, the ACT assessment and COMP are retaken, thus allowing measures of growth in the area of general education. Test results are aggregated at the academic discipline level, thereby facilitating an assessment of curricular strengths and weaknesses on a program-by-program basis.

Each graduating senior is required to complete an exam in a major field. Where applicable, all students complete the relevant Graduate Record Examination (GRE) field tests, or a preprofessional or certification instrument, where available, such as the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) Level II Achievement Exam, the Undergraduate Assessment Program (UAP) area examinations, or the National Teacher Examination (NTE). Students in those majors lacking a nationally-normed examination are tested using a locally-developed equivalent. Also required of each senior is a "capstone" experience consisting of participation in a seminar, a research project, completion of a thesis, a recital performance or some other comparable activity.

A further requirement for graduation is completion of a locally-developed Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), which includes questions from the SOSS and ISS. The results allow NEMSU to track attitudinal changes, students'

satisfaction with their learning experiences, and perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. By maintaining longitudinal data and developing profiles of changes in student attitudes and perceptions over time, Northeast reportedly is better able to monitor the performance and effectiveness of its instructional and support services.

Two additional follow-up surveys are used. One is an Alumni Survey utilized every third year to measure alumni satisfaction with their academic preparation. The other is an Employers Survey, distributed once every three years to almost 600 employers, requesting information on the academic and professional proficiency of the NEMSU graduates they have hired. Currently the total reported cost of Northeast's testing program runs slightly in excess of $56,000 annually.[20]

With a vastly-expanded student data base, onlined and available longitudinal and historically, by total institution, by discipline and major, and by individual student, NEMSU representatives are persuaded they can document the "value-added" or positive difference the institution makes in terms of student development, not to mention the national competitiveness of the university's graduates. "Northeast can and does measure the positive or negative difference in students' development from their freshmen year through graduation, and the comparative strength of Northeast's graduates vis-a-vis other students in the country," according to one former official.[21] Overall, what NEMSU has done, he claims, is to combine "a sense of mission among all levels of students with an evaluation process that verifies the impact of the total university experience of those students," demonstrating that in fact the institution can influence its students favorably by making "a positive and idenifiable contribution to their mental as well as personal development."[22]

Northeast officials further argue that assessment has not only created the conditions for change but also helped to give it direction and substance.[23] Armed with more detailed information than heretofor has been common in higher education, administrators and faculty alike are better able to improve their own performance, to review programs as needed, and to initiate necessary changes in instruction, curricula, and the organization and management of support services.

Early on, for example, it was found that Northeast's sophomores were scoring substantially higher on the ACT English test than before or at admission. Faculty were inclined to attribute the gain to a required competency-based freshman English course. Closer scrutiny of the data, however, revealed that students who had entered with high scores were not registering subsequent gains. It was discovered that many had substituted "advanced placement" or CLEP credit in English for the freshman course and had neither been required nor encouraged to take further writing courses. Hence the conclusion initially entertained that faculty had been teaching below the level of high-ability students was proved false. Subsequently, requirements were modified, aimed at improving the magnitude of improvement shown by high-scoring as well as lower-achieving students.[24]

Similarly, when it was found that graduating English majors were not performing at national standards, careful investigation showed that many had substituted less taxing classes for the more demanding core courses. Appropriate action followed, eliminating substitutions for essential courses. A significant improvement in student performance reportedly followed soon thereafter. Much the same pattern was repeated in the psychology program and in curricular requirements for a degree in business accounting. Likewise,

when surveys of nursing students' attitudes suggested widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of their preparatory program, changes were initiated which led to a substantial improvement in student morale and program acceptance.[25]

Defenders of NEMSU's assessment program are quick to counter detractors' criticisms. A common objection is that educational "quality" is too intangible and subjective to be assessed. The response is a flat denial. What can be taught can be tested for. The real issue, allegedly, is the basis upon which judgments about quality are made.[26] To critics who worry about "coaching" or "teaching to tests," proponents argue as follows: Available evidence indicates that short-term preparation yields inconsequential gains in performance on standardized tests. Hence it would be counter-productive for an institution to encourage "cramming." Nonspecific test-taking strategies, on the other hand, which do contribute to improved performance, can and should be developed among students. As for long-term preparation, which likewise can help performance, the distinction between "coaching" and "schooling" allegedly becomes so blurred as to obviate the original objection altogether.

Some skeptics raise questions about the content validity of standardized examinations. Supporters of Northeast's testing program tend to argue either that curricula <u>should</u> conform to the content tested for by national examinations or, alternatively, that alternative examinations can be devised. Either way, the review process is said to have salutory benefits in promoting awareness of what is or is not included in a given curriculum or program of studies. (Also worth noting is that when faculty volunteers found themselves scoring at the ninety-ninth percentile on selected national instruments, many of their original misgivings about the appropriateness of the tests disolved.)

Official reports of NEMSU's assessment program paint a glowing picture of an institution dedicated to value-added excellence. Understandably obscured in part by the rhetoric are occasional indications of internal dissatisfaction. How much support the testing program actually enjoys is impossible to determine. Conceivably the vast majority of administrators, faculty and students wholeheartedly endorses assessment. Nevertheless, there are reports--most of them difficult to document--of faculty skeptical of the real benefits involved, of student resentment over the time consumed by testing, of possible resistance and occasional sabatoge of evaluation procedures.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the overall impression conveyed is of a hard-driving, ambitious academic administration determined to transform Northeast into a major academic institution. Already it has begun to shed its regional identity, recently having been designated as the state's "official" undergraduate university specializing in liberal-arts education. Thanks in no small measure to the publicity surrounding its value-added assessment, in 1983 Northeast was selected by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities as a co-recipient of the prestigious G. Theodore Titau Award for innovation and Change in Higher Education. Finally, NEMSU's performance-based approach has won support from the state's legislature, promising possible benefits in terms of appropriations for program improvements. However incomplete or flawed may be Northeast's application of the value-added concept, it has thus proven to be a remarkably astute move politically. The lesson is one not likely to be overlooked by other comparable public institutions elsewhere.

Northeast Missouri State University is a relatively homogeneous institution, with an enrollment consisting for the most part of traditional undergraduate students. Its program offerings are limited in scope compared with those of larger universities. Whether or not the student assessment program inaugurated at NEMSU could be duplicated in quite the same fashion elsewhere therefore remains open to question. The Columbia campus of the University of Missouri (UMC), on the other hand, is the oldest and largest of a four-campus system, with a combined undergraduate and graduate enrollment exceeding 22,000 students. It features an extensive array of both graduate and undergraduate programs. As a larger, more diverse institution, its response to political pressure for accountability has assumed a quite different form. The challenges it faces as it attempts to fashion a comprehensive assessment system are rather more formidable and complex than those faced by the state's smaller regional institutions.

The UMC Experience

Missouri Governor John Ashcroft has long championed assessment as a means of bringing accountability to American public higher education. Addressing a 1985 meeting of the national Governors' Association Task Force on College Quality, which he chaired, Ashcroft spoke approvingly of the impetus to raise collegiate admission requirements, to devise standardized core curriculum, to impose more stringent student performance standards and to test for learning outcomes. "Public colleges and universities," he declared, "are discovering that taxpayers, and elected state officials who represent taxpayers, are demanding higher performance from students--and from the institutions that educate them."[27] Likewise, in a 1986 document entitled Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, which Ashcroft helped draft, strong

support was forthcoming for a comprehensive system of assessment as a means of promoting accountability in the nation's public system of post-secondary learning.[28]

Again in December of 1986, at a state-wide conference on assessment co-sponsored by the Governor and Missouri's Coordinating Board for Higher Education, Ashcroft urged representatives of the state's public institutions of higher learning to make assessment their top priority. Shortly thereafter, writing in Higher Education and National Affairs, he announced his expectation that each of Missouri's public colleges and universities would have "rigorous, systematic programs of student assessment...in place on each campus in the next academic year [i.e., 1987-88]." Programs were to include "elements of nationally-normed data;" they were to be "comprehensive" in assessing students' acquisition of knowledge and skills; and the results were to be made public.[29]

The Governors' mandate was unequivocal and unmistakable. Less than a week later, University of Missouri President C. Peter Magrath, speaking before a meeting of the University's Board of Curators, implicitly endorsed Ashcroft's agenda, including the requirement that an assessment system be operational in the 1987-88 academic year.[30] The Board's response was approval of a five-point policy statement enunciating guidelines for assessment on the University's four campuses.[31]

At this time and in a subsequent document approved several months later, the Board outlined what thereafter would serve as official policy.[32] It re-affirmed a proviso in its revised Long-Range Plan calling for improvement in the University's "ability to assess the extent to which it accomplishes its instructional mission."[33] Specifically, the Board wanted to know more about

student learning outcomes, post-graduation placements and students' self-assessments of their educational experiences.[34] Further, the Curators mandated that student-outcome assessment be used to improve the quality of instructional programs; that faculty play a "key role in the design and implementation of evaluation strategies..."; that assessment procedures be "diverse, sophisticated, and multiple"; and, finally, that results be made freely available to "students, faculty, and to the interested and concerned public."[35]

Meanwhile, undergraduate education had been the topic of the April 1986 general meeting of UMC faculty. In presenting an overview of undergraduate assessment, former Chancellor Barbara S. Uehling noted, "Today there is a wave of criticism across the county, and even self-flagellation, regarding higher education. A defense of higher education is not necessary to this crowd, but it is useful to think about how we justify ourselves to the outside world." Uehling wound up her remarks by advocating the use of a variety of approaches to assess the quality of the University's teaching efforts. She added, "We have nothing to do but gain by self-evaluation."[36] She and other administration officials repeatedly took pains to emphasize that the University's attempts to assess student learning were not solely the result of Governor Ashcroft's mandate. In fact they were only part of a much larger total quality assurance program begun long before.

Indicative of this concern was an initiative taken in March by the UMC Provost and Faculty Council to create four separate task forces charged with reviewing various aspects of the campus' undergraduate programs. They dealt, respectively, with the freshman-year experience, the training of teaching assistants, extra-classroom learning resources, and basic core competencies.

An ancillary charge to the last-mentioned was the devising of policy recommendations for assessing student learning outcomes.

The Task Force on Basic Competencies issued an interim report on assessment seven months later, in October of 1986. It began by cautioning against exclusive reliance upon objective, nationally standardized testing.[37] Also included was an enthusiastic endorsement of an innovative intensive writing and critical-thinking assessment instrument which had recently been devised by the Campus Writing Program. It is noteworthy, perhaps, that the Task Force made no mention of yet another on-going assessment effort begun previously, one involving the use of several American College Testing Program survey instruments to gauge student satisfaction with the overall quality of their undergraduate experience. This had been the outgrowth of a 1984 on-campus seminar conducted by the National Center for Higher Education Management System (NCHEMS), devoted to the topic of identifying and measuring student learning. Its eventual outcome was the administration by the UMC Office of Student, Personnel and Auxiliary Services of ACT Student Opinion Surveys to a random sample of over 2000 students in May of 1987. Soon thereafter the ACT Alumni and Withdrawing/Non-returning Student Surveys were likewise administered to a large randomly-selected population sample.

The Task Force's report notwithstanding, the Board of Curator's action at the end of the Fall term, 1986, calling for the emplacement of a comprehensive assessment program by 1987-88 appeared to catch most of the campus unprepared and off-guard. As the holiday recess drew near, the UMC Provost hastily convened a six-member Steering Committee on Assessment. Its charge was as ambitious as it was urgent: to design an overall campus assessment plan and to have it ready for implementation by the Fall of 1987. Clearly, its

predecessor-body's recommendation to expand the writing and critical-thinking project, included in the final report of the Task Force on Basic Competencies, was insufficient.[38] What the Governor, the University's President and the Board of Curators envisioned now was something much broader and farther-reaching in scope.

The Steering Committee lost no time is setting to work. By mid-January of 1987 it was engaged in intensive discussion with representatives of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey, seeking ways of satisfying the need for a "nationally-normed" component to the campus assessment plan. Privately, ETS officials expressed dismay over the hurried timetable involved in the decision-making process, a situation they considered unprecedented. Their misgivings were shared by members of the Steering Committee. Unwilling to sanction the use of any existing test, the Committee eventually agreed as an alternative to help pilot test a new ETS Academic Profile then under development. It would be made available in two formats: a one-hour version for use in program evaluations and a three-hour version for individual student evaluations.[38] The question left open for the moment was which version was more suitable for UMC's purposes as an experimental test site.

By the end of January the Steering Committee was prepared to recommend a tentative four-point campus assessment plan. Besides the Academic Profile test for assessing general education, it urged adoption of the writing and critical-thinking assessment project as an integral program element. Thirdly, it encouraged the use of the three ACT Student Opinion Surveys while recommending that a fourth instrument, an employer survey, be devised as well. Lastly, it suggested that the Provost inventory all departments on campus as

to their current evaluation procedures. Each academic unit would be asked also to outline its future plans for testing seniors in their major and to indicate the availability of appropriate examinations for doing so.

The Steering Committee's four-point plan was presented and accepted by the University's Board of Curators. Throughout the remainder of the Winter 1987 term, numerous meetings were held and presentations made to publicize the plan across the campus. Especially controversial was the proposed field testing of the ETS Academic Profile. Critics pointed out no uniform core curriculum existed. Moreover, it was observed, many students were failing to complete their general education requirements within a two-year time limit, thereby rendering the validity of a standardized test highly suspect. Student opposition to the use of the three-hour version of the Profile mounted. Ultimately, it was decided to pursue an institutional or program-based approach to assessment, using the one-hour test version. Left unanswered was a question of how coercive an approach would be required to ensure student compliance with and participation in the planned testing procedure.

In July of 1987 the Steering Committee submitted a position paper on assessing undergraduate student learning outcomes.[40] It opened with a lengthy review of previous and on-going assessment efforts, the Governor's call for systematic institutional appraisal, the assessment goals of the University revised Long-Range Plan, and the Curator's mandate to the campus. The paper reiterated the Committee's lack of support for the idea of using the American College Testing College Outcome Measures Project (ACT COMP), denying it could serve as a valid and reliable instrument to measure general education outcomes at UMC. Likewise, the Committee voiced doubts about any value-added

assessment model, such as that employed by Northeast Missouri State University:

> Value-added models are suspect in assessing higher education where the outcomes are considered more important than examining the processes of learning. Subtractive test-re-test procedures, separated by more than a year between tests, virtually ensure that students will do better on the second exam than on the first without providing any assurances that the gains can be credited to the curriculum. It is likely that at least part of the gain could be attributed to an improvement in the students' test taking ability, their maturation, or their experience with the world outside...the university curriculum.[41]

The paper's latter section dealt with the previously-approved four-point assessment plan: (1) evaluation of writing and critical-thinking skills; (2) the use of the ETS Academic Profile; (3) departmental assessments of proficiency in the major field; and (4) assessment of the total educational environment through a series of student, alumni and employer surveys. Once again, the Committee underscored its concern that assessment focus on the institution and its programs, not on individual students. To test all of the University's 17,000 or so undergraduates using standardized instruments, it was said, would run counter to good sampling theory, would be prohibitively expensive, and would entail a "logistical nightmare" never before contemplated or attempted by any institution of comparable size and range of mission.[42]

The paper's concluding section struck a decidedly cautionary note: "UMC faculty and students alike are keenly aware for the potential for abuse inherent in a program of arbitrary assessment or testing of students outside of the traditional course-related framework." It continued, "Some faculty and administrators have also voiced concern that students will view assessment as a trivial intrusion upon their serious pursuit of a degree or as an annoyance to be expedited quickly and will thus put forth minimal effort...." The

resultant "outcome," the Committee observed, might therefore reflect poorly on their mentors.[42]

Arguing against mandating use of the three-hour version of the ETS Academic Profile and a proposal to incorporate test scores as parts of a student's permanent record, the Steering Committee put itself on record in favor of a less coercive, non-punitive approach. Moreover, it firmly opposed "the use of assessment data for tenure, promotion, and salary adjustment purposes" involving faculty, or, in the case of students, "as a bar to graduating, admission to a specific program, or upper division course." Finally, the use of test results for drawing cross-departmental, divisional or other comparisons was strongly opposed.[43]

At the opening of the Fall, 1987, the UMC Vice Provost for Instruction sent our a lengthy memorandum to deans and departmental chairs outlining a "plan of action for assessment" for the academic year.[44] He reminded administrators that assessment of proficiency in the major field would be required of all departments and programs offering undergraduate majors. All other assessments (surveys and so forth) would be conducted by a sample of departments, including all those undergoing program review in 1987-88. November was stipulated as the deadline for submission of "a preliminary plan outlining the desired goals for graduates in the field, and the ways in which program assessment will be conducted with participation of students completing an undergraduate degree in May 1988."[45]

The Vice Provost indicated that a variety of assessment methodologies might be employed, including portfolio reviews, performance reviews, laboratory experiences, a capstone exercise, a faculty-developed exit examination, nationally-normed standardized tests, or admission tests taken by

pre-professional students entering upon a graduate program. To coordinate the development of more detailed assessment procedures, he announced, an ad-hoc faculty-student committee would be appointed and accorded temporary housing on campus By November 18, 1987, virtually all departments involved had in fact submitted detailed plans for assessing the proficiency of their respective majors. A follow-up memorandum from the Vice-Provost, dated February 5, 1988, laid out a detailed format to be followed by all departments in reporting the results of their assessment of student majors.

Faculty reactions were mixed. Some faculty questioned the cost of assessment at a time when other pressing needs remained unmet. There were complaints over the apparent lack of appropriate tests for assessment purposes. Difficulties involved in securing student cooperation troubled many. Others remained suspicious of the uses to which assessment data might be put. Some anticipated that "teaching to the test" would become a pervasive campus syndrome. Most frequently expressed were doubts as to whether any assessment process could accurately capture and represent the benefits of the total college experience. Others responded that assessment was a political reality unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future, and that realism dictated making the best of the situation. Some faculty remained optimistic, arguing that assessment should be given a chance and that the potential benefits to be derived were not inconsiderable.

Matters came to a head in November of 1987 when a special faculty meeting was called in the College of Arts and Science. Proposed for discussion was a resolution demanding "through discussion among and approval by the general faculty" of any assessment program. An amendment (subsequently defeated) urged the College ot decline to participate in any program until such debate

and an endorsement had occurred. The meeting was tense. Leading the opposition to assessment was Kerby Miller, a UMC professor of history. In remarks delivered before the faculty and later reprinted in a local newspaper, Miller assailed the prospect of faculty compliance with the proposed program as a "political sell out."

Assessment is fundamentally a teaching issue, he argued, one cutting to the very heart of the educational enterprise. Faculty were never adequately consulted about the validity of desirability of assessment; they were merely called upon to help rationalize and implement it, he claimed. Miller voiced apprehension that teaching for understanding, analysis and problem-solving would be subordinated to preparation for test-taking. As for the supposed success of value-added education at Northeast Missouri State, he alleged that class essay test and term papers had been replaced there by machine-graded exams designed to familiarize students with the tricks of standardized evaluation. "In spite of the pressures exerted upon them," he avowed, "a large number of the Kirksville campus's faculty and students regard the value-added system as fraudulent and demeaning. A few even silently endeavor to sabotage that system, causing administrators no end of trouble identifying and discounting intentionally mismarked exams so the scores will not lower the campus average."[47]

Miller questioned the political motives of those proposing assessment:

> It would be pleasant to assume that those purposes and motives are benign. But that would be naive, for we have few reasons to believe that assessment results will be used to encourage public recognition of the university system's need for adequate state funding. It is much more likely that high scores will be interpreted as evidence that current funding levels are adequate, while low scores will be used to justify funding postponement or even punishment until scores improve.[48]

He found the argument that the purpose of assessment was to make the University prove it was giving the people of Missouri full value for tax monies currently expended bitterly ironic. Missouri's per capita funding for higher education, he correctly observed, ranks at or near the bottom of even the so-called Big Eight schools Inverting the argument, he claimed that low assessment scores should demonstrate that Missouri was receiving--and deserved--precisely what it paid for. More generous funding, he added, would require greater commitment and courage: "It is easier and cheaper to delude the public by embracing a superficial 'quick fix' that panders to a low-tax, anti-intellectual mentality, puts the university on the defensive and forces its campuses to engage in debilitating competition for inadequate resources."[49]

Miller concluded that the University's administrative leadership had bowed all too quickly to pressures from external bodies for reasons of self-preservation. "Certainly," he commented acidly, "people who remain on their knees are less visible targets than those who stand upright." Hence, it would fall to the faculty, Miller reiterated, to challenge and refute, rather than pander to, what he termed the "chimera" of accountability through assessment.[50]

Following protracted debate, the Arts and Science faculty by a narrow vote approved a resolution requiring faculty assent before assessment was extended beyond the trial period of 1987-88. Shortly thereafter, the UMC Faculty Council announced it planned to appoint a "blue ribbon" committee to "assess assessment" and to hold Spring hearings on the issue. This too proved controversial. Amidst allegations that the Chair of the Faculty Council intended to "pack" the committee with assessment supporters, debate arose over

who would serve as members. Critics were mollified only when self-identified critics of UMC's assessment scheme were included on the committee. In a separate action at a December 9 meeting, the entire UMC faculty endorsed the original Arts and Science resolution calling for formal faculty approval before the campus assessment plan could be extended beyond the end of the academic year 1987-88.[51]

Field testing of the ETS Academic Profile took place on February 17 and 18, 1988. Some 800 juniors were asked to volunteeer. Few showed up. Commenting on the lack of cooperation, a UMC associate professor claimed he was not surprised. Why should students subject themselves to testing, he asked, "merely to satisfy a governor who has not been a friend to high education?" He continued:

> More importantly, the governor and company have shown their contempt for a democratic educational process by forcing the University into compliance with a plan that the faculty and students have not even had a chance to discuss. Instead of writing edicts for the University, the governor should ask more questions, for example how can one improve the quality of education in this state without funding it. As more money is poured into assessment in another lean fiscal year, less is alloted to the areas that need more funds. One can only sympathize with students who see further increases in tuition in order to implement the assessment program.[52]

The same faculty member sardonically congratulated those who had declined to participate in the testing program. "Those who chose to play basketball, chat with friends, or even spend some time in a local watering hole," he affirmed, "probably had a more worthwhile educational experience."[53]

Thus, as the academic year drew to a close, the institution remained as divided as ever over assessment issues. Administrators were pledged to make the program work. Departments were engaged in a variety of novel testing procedures, albeit some in fairly desultory fashion. Hearings were scheduled

by the Faculty Council's assessment committee. Most students were oblivious to the commotion or indifferent to it altogether. But faculty critics remained as angry and resentful as they had been the the Fall. A majority, although a remarkably silent and subdued segment of the faculty, appeared resigned to more testing. Supporters, insofar as can be judged, remained optimistic that the University of Missouri-Columbia had embarked upon a worthwhile undertaking offering significant promise for the institution's future. On one point, however, all could agree: much experimentation and discussion lay ahead. It remained to be seen whether the UMC experience with assessment would prove as useful as its enthusiasts hoped for or as counter-productive as its detractors anticipated.

* * *

Notes

[1]William J. Bennett, "Foreword" to Terry W. Hartle et. al., Assessment in American Higher Education, Issues and Contexts (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, n.d.), p.i.

[2]Report of the Southern Regional Educational Board, Access to Quality Undergraduate Education (1985); reprinted in The Chronicle of Higher Education (July 3, 1985): 9-12; cited also in Terry W. Hartle, "The Growing Interest in Measuring the Educational Achievement of College Students," in Hartle, op cit., p. 1.

[3]See Clifford Adelman, The Standardized Test Scores of College Graduates, 1964-1982 (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1985).

[4]Andrew Hacker, "The Decline of Higher Learning," The New York Review of Books (February 13, 1986): 36.

[5]For example, consult Scott Jaschik, "The Questioning Role of Colleges in Remedial Study," The Chronicle of Higher Education (September 11, 1985); cited in Hartle, p. 1.

[6]Alan Bloom, "Our Listless Universities," National Review, 31(23) (December 10,1982): 1537-1548.

[7]See Arliss Christ-Janer, "Institutional Mission in an Era of Retrenchment," Liberal Education, 66(2), (1980): 161-168.

[8]Note the discussion in G.W, Bonham, "The Mission of Higher Education in Contemporary Society," Liberal Education, 66(2) (1980): 121-131.

[9]For example, see G. Austin and H. Garber (eds.), The Rise and Fall of National Test Scores (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

[10]See also L. Marcus, A. Leone and E. Goldberg, The Path to Excellence: Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Higher Education, AAHE-ERIC, 1983).

[11]F. Kiehle, The Use of State Level Goals of the Basis for Assessing Postsecondary Education Performance (Washington, D.C.: Governors' Committee on Postsecondary Education, ERIC ED 21024, october, 1981)

[12]J.O'Neill, "Examinations and Quality Control," in J.R. Warren (ed.), Meeting the New Demand for Standards (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983). pp. 69-80.

[13]See "Bennett Says Colleges Must Find Ways to Measure Success," The Chronicle of Higher Education (October 30, 1985); cited in Lauren Huffman, "Preparing for the Business World: Value-Added Assessment in Higher Education," Today's Manager, 1, 5 (January, 1986): 14.

[14]Quoted in "Campuses Urged to Take the Lead," Higher Education and National Affairs, 33, 4 (March 9, 1984): 4.

[15]Alexander W. Astin, "Preface" to Chimezie A.B., Osigweh, In Pursuit of Degrees With Integrity (Washington: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1984), p. xi.

[16]Ibid. p. xi.

[17]See R.A. Scott, Program Review's Missing Member: A Consideration of Quality and Its Assessment (Washington, D.C.: ERIC ED 167015, 1980); Alexander W. Astin, "Productivity of Undergraduate Institutions," Science 136, (April 13, 1962): 129-135; Astin, "Undergraduate Achievement and Institutional 'Excellence'," Science 161 (August 16, 1968): 661-667; and Astin, "Why Not Try Some New Ways of Measuring Quality?" Educational Record 63(2) (Spring 1982): 10-15.

[18]Osisgweh, op. cit, p. 15.

[19]The Assessment Program, Northeast Missouri State University (Kirksville, Missouri: Northeast Missouri State University, August 7, 1987), p. 2. For a concise description and summary, see Peter T. Ewell, The Self-Regarding Institution: Information for Excellence (Boulder, Colorado: National Center for Higher Education Systems, 1984), pp. 63-64. Also note Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 12-16.

[20]See Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education, Show Me Excellence, Assessment in Missouri Public Colleges and Universities (Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education, December, 1987), pp. 17-20.

[21]Chimezie A. B. Osigweh, "An Evaluation Model of Training Outcomes for Higher Education," Educational evaluation and Policy Analysis, 8, 2, (Summer, 1986): 167-168; See also Osigweh, Self-Study (Kirksville, Missouri: Northeast Missouri State University, 1984); Osigweh, "A Model of Value-Added in Business Education," Journal of Business Education 60, 7 (May, 1985): 298-304; and Osigweh, Assessing the Quality of Undergraduate Education (Kirksville, Missouri: Northeast Missouri State University, 1982).

[22]Osigweh, "An Evaluation Model," op. cit., p. 168.

[23]See Charles J. McClain and Darrell W. Krueger, "Using Outcomes Assessment: A Case Study in Institutional Change," in Peter T. Ewell (ed.), Assessing Educational Outcomes (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, new Directions for Institutional Research No. 47, September, 1985), p. 39; and Charles J. McClain, "Assessment Produces Degrees with Integrity," Educational Record, 68(1) (Winter, 1987): 47-52.

[24]Osigweh, In Pursuit of Degrees With Integrity, p. 32.

[25]Cited in Osigweh, "An Evaluation Model," op. cit., pp. 174-175.

[26]Note the discussion in C. Robert Pace, "Historical Perspectives on Student Outcomes: Assessment with Implications for the Future," NASPA Journal 22, 2 (Fall, 1984): 10-18.

[27]John Ashcroft, "How Can You Measure College Learning?" Governors' Weekly Bulletin 36 (September 20, 1985): 3.

[28]National Governors Association, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, 1986), pp. 154-167.

[29]John Ashcroft, "A Different Reform is Coming," Higher Education and National Affairs (December 15, 1986): 6. Earlier, in August of 1986, the Missouri Council on Public Higher Education (COPHE), composed of the presidents and chancellors of Missouri's public four-year colleges and universities had made a commitment to Governor Ashcroft to establish assessment programs on all of the COPHE campuses. By October, COPHE charged a committee of delegates representing each campus with developing a plan for each institution. See Missouri Council on Public Higher Education, Report of COPHE Faculty Committee on Assessment (April 15, 1987).

[30]C. Peter Magrath, Improving Student Learning at the University of Missouri. Unpublished paper read before the University's Board of Curators on December 10, 1986.

[31]"Board Policy on Assessment," approved by the University of Missouri Board of Curators, December 12, 1986.

[32]"Guidelines For Assessment Program," approved by the University of Missouri Board of Curators, September, 1987.

[33]Ibid., p. 1. See The Long-Range Plan of the University of Missouri, Part IV: Goals and Objectives, p. 11.

[34]"Board Policy on Assessment," p. 1.

[35]Ibid., p. 1.

[36]"Measuring Quality Education," Mizzou Weekly (May 2, 1986): 2.

[37]Chancellor's Task Force on Basic Competencies, Preliminary Report: Assessment of Student Outcomes (October 14, 1986).

[38]Report of the Chancellor's Task Force on Basic Competencies, Part III: Assessment (January 31, 1987).

[39]The Academic Profile as a test of general education is intended to measure academic skills in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. It utilizes a matrix consisting of the three major discipline groups against college level reading, writing critical thinking and mathematical data as skills-dimensions.

[40]Provost's Steering Committee on Assessment, Assessment of Undergraduate Student Outcomes at UMC (July 31, 1987).

[41]Ibid., p. 3.

[42]Ibid., p. 4

[43]Ibid., p. 9.

[44]The memorandum was dated September 29, 1987.

[45]Ibid., p. 2.

[46]Kerby Miller, "Albatross of Assessment is a Political Sellout," Columbia Daily Tribune (January 24, 1988): 41.

[47]Ibid., p. 41.

[48]Ibid., p. 41.

[49]Ibid., p. 41.

[50]Ibid., p. 41.

[51]"Minutes form December 9 General Faculty Meeting," Faculty Forum, 3, 1 (January 26, 1988): 3.

[52]Michael Ugarte, "Torture Tests," Maneater 47, 13 (February 23, 1988): 10.

[53]Ibid., p. 10.